

PROPOSAL TO THE CHILDREN'S BUREAU
FOR AWARD OF RESEARCH GRANT

RESEARCH - ACTION PROJECT ON PREVENTION OF FAMILY DISORGANIZATION

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

1. Research or Demonstration Plan

a. Aim of the Project

The proposed project has three broad objectives which can be summarized as follows:

1. To study family disorganization in process of longitudinal research on the social functioning of a random sample of young, urban families
2. To provide multi-faceted social work services to families showing emerging deviance in the direction of social disorganization
3. To evaluate the effect of such services by means of an experimental-control design

This project seeks to combine the social functioning approach applied longitudinally over the first five-year span of the family life cycle with social work services aimed at preventive intervention. The latter concept, borrowed from public health, is used here to denote secondary prevention or service aimed at coping with emerging deviance which has not reached the level of full pathology. A discussion of the social action part of the project will be given under 1c (Mode of Operation).

The projected study will attempt to answer three basic questions. Which families in society tend to become disorganized? What is the nature of the disorganization process? How useful is social work intervention in preventing severe family disorganization?

Proposal to the Children's Bureau

The concept of family functioning which has been operationally defined by means of the St. Paul Scale of Family Functioning* and subsequent refinements of the instrument** permits the formulation of testable, specific hypotheses relative to the nature of and change in family functioning. A few of the salient hypotheses which will guide this study can be stated as follows: (1) The degree of malfunctioning of a young family of procreation is directly related to the degree of instability of the marital pairs' families of orientation. (2) Agreement (vs. disagreement) between husband and wife on family values and goals is directly related to the overall level of family functioning. (3) Severe family disorganization develops a year or more after the birth of the first child. (4) The visibility of family malfunctioning is class related. (5) Family disorganization is a process that has its origin in problems of intra-familial relationships and proceeds over time to affect relationships beyond the family system and social functioning in the instrumental areas of family life. (6) Severe family disorganization appearing later in the family life cycle can be predicted early by a study of family interaction patterns and values. (7) Social work intervention aimed at modifying problematic role patterns will serve to ameliorate existing family malfunctioning or prevent serious family disorganization.

* L.L. Geismar and Beverly Ayres. Measuring Family Functioning. A Manual on a Method for Evaluating the Social Functioning of Disorganized Families. Family Centered Project, St. Paul, Minn., 1960.

** L.L. Geismar, Michael A. LaSorte, and Beverly Ayres. "Measuring Family Disorganization." Marriage and Family Living, Vol. 24, No. 1, Feb. 1962, pp. 51-55.

L.L. Geismar. "Applying an Operational Definition of Family Functioning in Determining Need for Services." Paper presented at the 57th Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association. Sept. 1, 1962. Washington, D.C.